

REMEMBERING BOB KINDRICK

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My friendship with Bob dates back to the 1975 CARA meeting at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. (CARA is the acronym of the Medieval Academy's Committee on Centers And Regional Associations, which is concerned with matters relating to medieval studies in a variety of institutions in North America.) The St. John's meeting was important, for there, on the frozen tundra of the Upper Midwest, the younger generation of medievalists who would eventually assume major leadership roles in CARA and the Medieval Academy met for the first time. And the rest, we could say, is history.

Bob was not the only medievalist at his university. At a subsequent CARA meeting in St. Louis, I met two of his colleagues in the English Department of Central Missouri State University, and they became known as the "Three Bobs"—Bob Kindrick, Bob Greybill, and Bob Lovell. The "Three Bobs" seemed ubiquitous and inseparable. They would often arrive at a conference—CARA, Kalamazoo, etc.—all together in a large sedan, having driven straight through from Warrensburg, Missouri, regardless of the distance. Bob loved conferences and was a permanent fixture at many of them.

Several medieval organizations owe Bob a great debt. Indeed, without his assistance and expertise, what or where would they be today? Well, some would probably not exist, while others would not be where—or what—they are today. Take the Medieval Association of the Midwest, or MAM as it is usually, and affectionately, called. Together with the redoubtable Merle Fifield of Ball State University, Bob was a moving force behind its creation, but he never craved nor sought the limelight, always being content to remain in the background, making sure that everything was running as it should. He enjoyed being the one responsible for the smooth operation of any enterprise, but he did not want to run the show. Rather, what seemed to give Bob the most pleasure was to see his creation, his brain child, in operation, running

Bob's record of commitment to professional associations is both long and significant. He was Executive Secretary of MAM for sixteen years (1988-2004). As one of the early contributors to the work of CARA, Bob became secretary in 1985 and remained in that position for almost two decades. He was the founding executive secretary of the Illinois Medieval Association for nine years (1984-93), and was active in TEAMS as Interim Chair (1985-86) and as member of the Executive Committee (1986-89) and Board of Directors (1986-2004). He was also in large part responsible for certain publications: from the perhaps infelicitously named journal *Ralph*, which would, as he said, get *SMART* (*Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching*), to the annual volumes of *PMAM* (new title: *Enarratio: Proceedings of the Medieval Association of the Midwest*), now in its thirteenth year.

We always wondered how Bob did it. He was generous to a fault, always having the resources to cover a meal for the council of some association or another, or simply to host a dinner for friends who, following a conference, would gather in one of the finer restaurants where wine and conversation flowed freely until late in the evening. Bob liked to cultivate an air of mystery about himself, one that seemed to hark back to the days of speakeasies and prohibition, of Al Capone and mobsters. Indeed, he enjoyed making offers that no one could refuse and became affectionately known as the god-father of MAM. The dark suit, the hat, the thin mustache, the cigar, the big car—these were his signature items.

It was easy to get Bob's attention. All you had to do was to hum a few bars or recite a few well chosen lyrics from a good old rock and roll song, and his eyes would begin to shine, his lips would mouth the verses, and you knew he was in seventh heaven. All the cares in the world disappeared when a favorite oldie-but-goodie entered the conversation, and he would often give a creditable rendition in his inimitable *basso profundo*. He seemed to have a special liking for the tunes from the late 50s and 60s. I seem to recall that he was especially fond of groups like Smokey Robinson and the Miracles ("Shop Around"), The Shirelles ("Mama Said"), The Coasters ("Charlie Brown" and "Searchin'"), The Clovers ("Love Potion #9"), The Platters ("Twilight Time" and "The Great Pretender"), and The Temptations ("My Girl"). Bob's preferences may have been

conditioned by his Kansas City roots, with which we associate Charlie “Bird” Parker (born in Kansas City, Kansas, he grew up in Kansas City, Missouri) and Herb Reed, who sang bass for The Platters. Whatever the reason, some of us shared his enthusiasm for these early artists and their music.

And then there were the cigars—big stogies—and cigarettes after a meal or during a break in a conference. If you saw smoke, you could bet that Bob was there, puffing away. At CARA meetings it was generally agreed that breaks would occur about once every hour or so to allow Bob the chance for a smoke. And since he was taking minutes at the meeting, nothing could happen until he returned. Later, when Kristie Bixby took on secretarial responsibilities for both CARA and MAM, Bob did not have to return quite so quickly to the meeting, for the minute-taking was in her able hands.

Bob was also a scholar and editor, whose rich and varied legacy of published essays and volumes will long endure. The range of their subjects is impressive: from *Beowulf* and the Old French *Chanson de Roland* and *Tristan* to Malory, Henryson, Dunbar, and Robert Burns. His editorial work includes the poetry of Robert Henryson and multiple volumes of *Teaching the Middle Ages* and *Essays in Medieval Studies*. Some of his essays also treat themes in higher education appropriate to his position(s) as a university administrator.

Bob showed his administrative talents early on, serving as Head of the English Department at Central Missouri State University (1975-80). From there over the next twenty years, Bob moved up the career ladder: from Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Illinois University (1980-84), to Vice President for Academic Affairs at Emporia State University (1984-87), Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Eastern Illinois University (1987-91), and several positions at The University of Montana—University Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dean of the Graduate School (1991-2000). His last post was as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research at Wichita State University (2000-04). His positions gave him certain perks, and these he generously shared with his colleagues. I recall, for example, Bob’s hosting of a most memorable CARA executive council meeting in 1992 at the University of Montana in Missoula, as well as in the scenic surroundings of Glacier National

Park. In all of his many academic roles, Bob was judicious and innovative. Indeed, we knew that he was one of us, and we trusted him and his judgment.

Bob had the common touch. He could—and did—wheel and deal with university presidents, boards of trustees, and wealthy alumni, but he never forgot that he was first and foremost a fellow faculty member, a teacher, a scholar, a medievalist. While others had gone over to the “dark side,” Bob was and would always be one of us. This quality endeared him to his medieval colleagues in North America, for we knew that he understood what was truly important in the academic enterprise and, moreover, that he was able to act on his beliefs, thus creating a wide variety of opportunities for all of us. Bob’s superb record of service to medieval studies was recognized in the spring of 2004 when the Medieval Academy of America conferred on him the CARA Award for Outstanding Service to Medieval Studies, and this award has been renamed in his honor.

Bob left us all too soon. The ever-present and acute sense of loss we feel is, however, somewhat assuaged by our memories of him in many and various settings and situations. We remember Bob, his neatly trimmed mustache and resonant voice, his cigars, hat, dark suit and big car, but perhaps most of all we remember his gentle smile and his infectious laugh. And the smiles that come to our lips when we remember our times with Bob will be a constant source of consolation and inspiration.

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